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**File Code:** 1950  
**Date:** June 20, 2018

Dear Concerned Citizen:

I am pleased to present the proposed action for the American Park Collaborative Forest Restoration Planning project for your review. The Cuba Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest is embarking on an analysis of a proposed action for the American Park Collaborative Forest Restoration Planning project and will be preparing an environmental assessment (EA). At this time, a decision has not been made. Comments on the proposed action should be as specific as possible to assist us in the analysis. If you provide or refer to data and/or research results, please identify why the information is pertinent to the American Park Collaborative Forest Restoration Planning project and provide a copy of the information. Although comments are welcome anytime, they would be most effective if received by August 17, 2018.

I expect an environmental assessment will be prepared to disclose the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of alternative 1, no action and alternative 2, the proposed action, as well as any alternatives that may be developed in response to public or internal issues.

### **Background**

The American Park Collaborative Forest Restoration Planning Project is an effort to improve forest ecosystem resilience and function in the American Park Project Area (Figure 1) which includes portions of the Headwater Rio de las Vacas watershed and portions of the Rito Penas Negras watershed in the Santa Fe National Forest, near Cuba, New Mexico (see location map below). This effort is a Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) project.

The Headwaters Rio de Las Vacas and the Rito Penas Negras watersheds within the project area have not yet been subject to stand-replacing fires, making it a treatment priority to prevent these watershed areas from burning in the same type of catastrophic fire events that have befallen much of the Jemez Mountains in the past two decades.

Starting in 2013 until present, over 25 agencies and groups have met and helped develop plans for components of the American Park Project area. The group proposes to treat approximately 20,220 forested acres across USFS land taking into account wildlife habitat and cultural resources. The American Park project area is included within the 5 year plan for restoration on the Santa Fe National Forest.

### **Location**

The project area includes lands within the Headwaters Rio de Las Vacas and the Rito Penas Negras watersheds in the Cuba Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest (see Figures 1 and 2) in Sandoval and Rio Arriba Counties, New Mexico. Two communities (Deer Lake and Weatherill Estates) are located within or adjacent to the project area. The western boundary of the American Park Project area is 8.5 miles due east of Cuba, New Mexico.

The San Pedro Mountains in the project area range from an elevation of 9,730 feet above sea level on Deer Mountain to about 8,000 feet in the southern riparian areas of the project. The predominant forest type is white fir and wet mixed conifer in the northern part of the project area and a mix of ponderosa



pine and dry mixed conifer in the southern part of the project area with patches of spruce-fir and aspen in the highest elevations.

There are portions of two Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUC) 12 watersheds in the American Park project areas. The western two thirds of the project area is within the Headwaters Rio de las Vacas watershed and contains five creeks including all or portions of the Rio de las Vacas, Clear Creek, American Creek, Rito las Palomas, and Rock Creek. The eastern third of the project area is within the Rito Penas Negras watershed and includes portions of both the Rito Café and the Rito Penas Negras.

### **Purpose and Need for Action**

The purpose of the American Park project is to improve forest ecosystem resilience the project area in the Santa Fe National Forest. Current ecological conditions are not consistent and departed from desired conditions. In order to meet the purpose of the project, there is a need:

1. Restore natural fire regime by improving forest stand conditions so that natural fires can safely occur by moving species composition back to a more natural balance; decreasing the amount of dead, down and standing fuel; creating more landscape patchiness, with groups of trees, spaces between the groups, and small meadow openings; and thinning the forest and doing prescribed burns to reduce the risk of severe fire.
2. Improve forest health and treating insect and disease infestations.

### **Proposed Action**

The forest is proposing to implement restoration treatments that would restore resilience to forest throughout the project area. Forest health treatments would be designed to restore the natural processes that have been disrupted by human activity in the project area. Proposed treatments are described below:

- Thinning treatments to reduce overly dense stands  
Thinning will be the most effective way to reduce the number of trees across the landscape and will help improve forest health and reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire.
- Prescribed burns  
Fire is an important part of the ecosystem and prescribed burning will help consume excessive fuel loads. Broadcast and pile burning treatments will be used.
- Commercial timber sales  
Timber sales will help remove trees from the ecosystem and will improve stocking conditions and reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire.
- Cut areas with infestations of dwarf mistletoe  
Removing trees infected with dwarf mistletoe will improve forest health and will help prevent future infestations.
- Cut trees in meadows that have been invaded by conifers  
Removing conifers from wet meadows will help restore riparian areas.

### **Public Meetings**

July 26, 2018 6:00-7:00 pm at REI 1500 Mercantile Ave NE, Albuquerque

August 9, 2018 4:00-6:00 pm Sandoval County Fairgrounds Community Building Cuba, NM

At both of these meetings, you will have the opportunity to sign up for a field tour of the proposed project area planned for Saturday August 11 from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm. You may also sign up for the tour by

calling the Cuba Office at 575-289-3264. We will meet for the tour at 9:30 at the Cuba District Ranger Office in Cuba, NM.

Please submit scoping comments to Sandra Imler-Jacquez, Environmental Coordinator, at 11 Forest Lane Santa Fe, NM 87508, phone (505) 438-5443 or by email to [comments-southwestern-santafe-cuba@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southwestern-santafe-cuba@fs.fed.us). If you do not wish to comment at this time, but would like to continue receiving information about this project, please let us know. Additional information about this project will be sent to those people who request it or who have submitted comments during the analysis process.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Jamie M. Bennett*

JAMIE BENNETT

District Ranger

Cuba Ranger District

Santa Fe National Forest

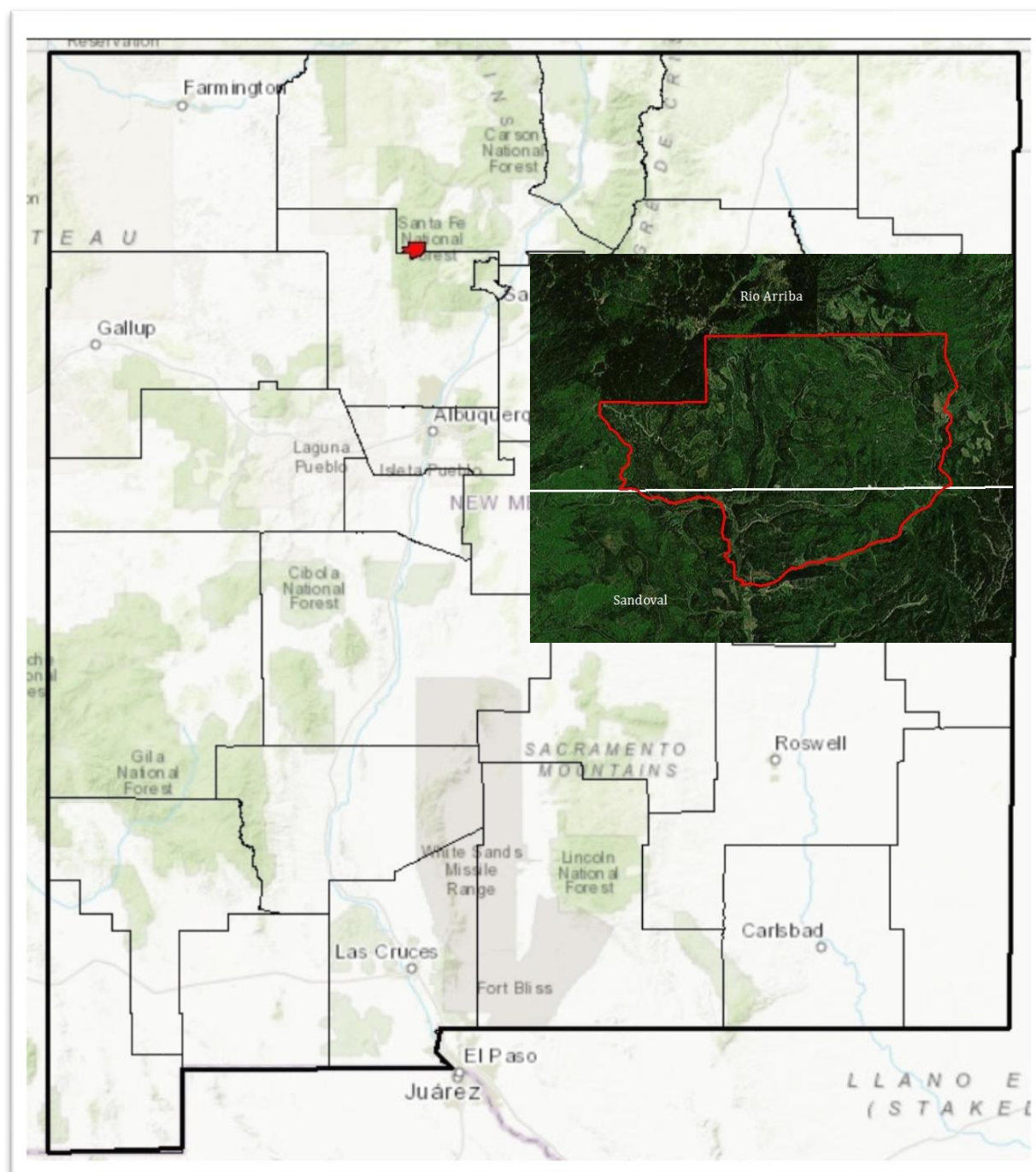


Figure 1. American Park project vicinity map.

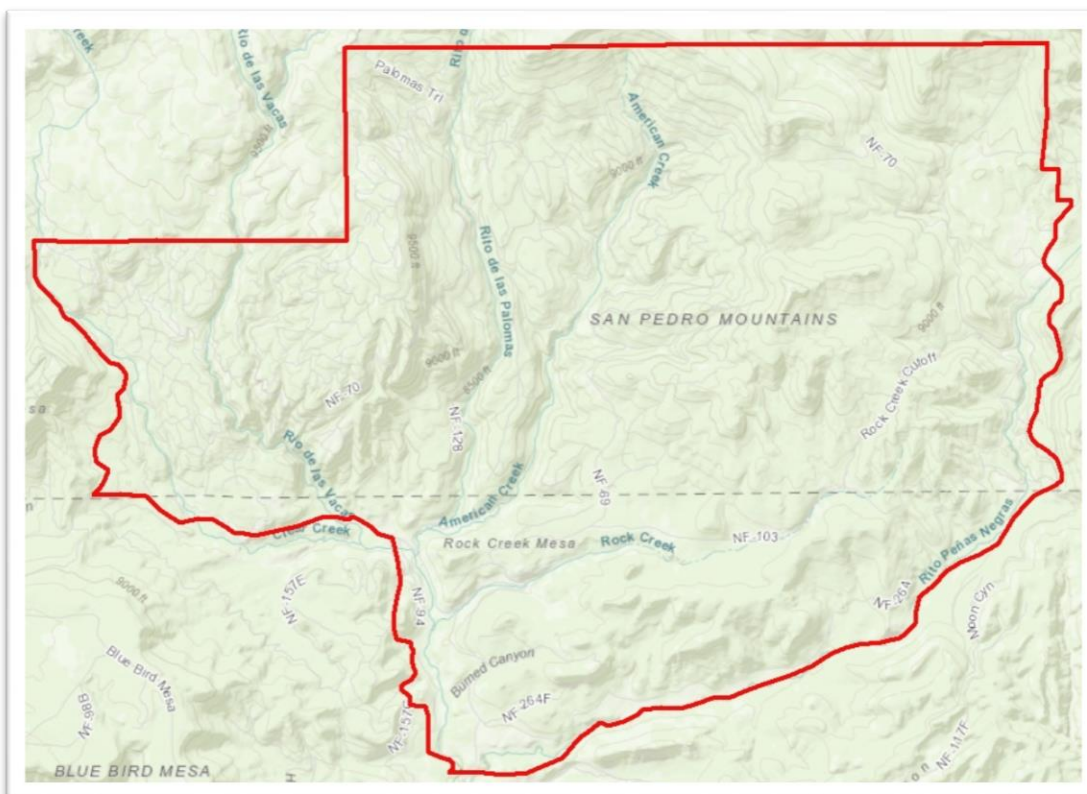


Figure 2. American Park project location map.